

7 August 2008

Dear Friends and Colleagues in the Entertainment industry,
Thank you for your supporting email and the generous sharing of your experiences and advise. I wanted to update you as to what has progressed since my first email ([STC Letter 15-7;08 is attached for your reference](#)). First, I'll summarize some of the fundamental changes the casting process needs to undergo so as to give a fair go to more Australian actors and agents.

1. Casting briefs for feature films, TV productions, stage productions and TV commercials must be made available to ALL talent agencies in the city (or cities) where the casting will be held. The casting process must be made transparent.

1. All professional actors (MEAA members, subscribers to Showcast and At2, etc.) must have the opportunity to audition for all principal roles in film, TV and stage projects. (MEAA's Simon Whipp says in response to my letter, "it is only fair that all actors who are paying for the casting tools – Showcast and AT2, have the right to be considered for all roles being cast. By this I would mean that we do not agree with a practice which would exclude certain agents or performers from briefing... At the moment, effectively, those performers whose agents are not receiving all briefs are subsidizing those who do. This is simply not fair.")

Therefore, each talent agency in the city where the casting is being held should have the right to submit for all the roles in a project, including the principal ones. More importantly, a percentage (to be decided) of the submitted actors from each agency must be auditioned for the principal roles. Of course, each production needs "stars" to make the project attractive in the marketplace, but there are always other principal roles that require not so much "names" but excellent actors. Each talent agency should have at least a minimum percentage of actors

seen for a production.

1. Screen Australia, Australia Council for the Arts and other federal and state funding bodies should put into their funding applications the requirements stated above in items 1 and 3. In my discussions with several casting directors, they have cited the lack of time and resources to see more actors. If the funding bodies are able to provide additional funding support for a broader casting initiative and make it a mandatory requirement in the granting of funding, then the casting directors will have the directive, initiative and resources to see more actors.

Screen Australia's Executive Director (Strategy and Operations) Fiona Cameron has responded to my letter in saying, "You raise some very interesting and challenging matters. All Screen Australia's programs and services are under review for 2009 and beyond and we will certainly take your views into consideration."

I have also received support from Julian Skinner MP (NSW Shadow Minister for the Arts). She says, "The suggestion you raise for a more transparent and open system of casting, and for an increase in NSW Government Funding have been noted. Please rest assured that the NSW Liberal/National Coalition will consider your suggestions and ideas in our future policy development process."

1. Our industry should push for "colour blind casting." Our main Australia TV series, TV shows and feature films still portray an overwhelmingly monoculture society. MEAA's Simon Whipp, in his response to my letter, says "We would agree that there is insufficient representation of non-anglo Australia in television drama productions. We are actually hosting a summit on Australian content later in the year and this is one of the issues which will be discussed."

He also brought to my attention the 22/7/08 article in Britain's Courier Mail entitled, "*Neighbours* is "too white." It cites a report

by the Equality and Human Rights Commission chairman Trevor Philips which says that many of Britain's major broadcasters remained 'hideously white' when choosing programs.

Neighbours, which is screened on the Five network, and the BBC comedy *The Vicar of Dibley* were singled out for being "all white." This should be a wake-up call for the producers of Australian dramas that if they are hoping to sell their product on the current world market, a more realistic cultural representation of Australian society is urgently and desperately needed to be accepted.

1. The implementation and monitoring of the above initiatives should be responsibility of a specific independent government body or of an entertainment industry ombudsman who has the power to effectively deal with any injustices and complaints within the entertainment industry.

Thus far, I have continued to receive emails of encouragement from talent agents around Australia. From official quarters, I have thus far received supportive responses from the following:

1. MEAA (Simon Whipp, Equity Director)
2. Screen Australia (Fiona Cameron, Executive Director, Strategy and Operations, on behalf of Chairman Glen Boreham)
3. Julian Skinner MP (NSW Shadow Minister for the Arts, on behalf of NSW Leader of the Opposition, Mr. Barry O'Farrell MP)

I'll keep you informed of developments and appreciate any continued advise from you regarding the suggestions. With the efforts by all of us, a workable solution will evolve.

Sincerely,
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